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ABSTRACT

This booklet is a printed edition of a talk given to parents of children at The Aquinas Montessori School (Alexandria, Virginia) in 1966, when the school was newly opened. Later, at the request of parents, the booklet was prepared and used for parent education and information by many other Montessori schools and organizations. The booklet describes Maria Montessori's view of the characteristics of the "normalized" child, an ideal of child development espoused by Montessori and striven for in Montessori education by providing environments that meet all of a child's developmental needs. The booklet discusses the needs of children in achieving normalization: (1) the need for movement; (2) the need for language development; (3) the need for independence; (4) the need for love and security; (5) the need for discipline; and (6) the need for order. Assuming these needs are met, the normalized child will appear. The booklet goes on to discuss the normalized child's characteristics, including: (1) a love of order; (2) a love of work; (3) love of silence and working alone; (4) mutual aid and cooperation; (5) profound spontaneous concentration; (6) obedience; (7) independence and initiative; (8) spontaneous self-discipline; (9) attachment to reality; (10) sublimation of the possessive instinct; and (11) joy. (EV)

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The Normalized Child

By

KATHLEEN A. SMITH

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The Normalized Child

by Kathleen H. Futrell

PREFACE

One is tempted to say that the children are performing spiritual exercises, having found the path of self-perfectionment and of ascent to the inner heights of the soul.

—Maria Montessori,
The Absorbent Mind

This booklet is a printed edition of a talk given to parents of children at The Aquinas Montessori School (Alexandria, Virginia) in 1966, when the school was newly opened. Later, at the request of parents, the booklet was prepared and was subsequently used for parent education and information by many other Montessori schools and organizations.

While this talk confined itself to the needs and characteristics of the child up to six years of age, the Aquinas School has since gone on to educate children through the elementary years. In reprinting the booklet at this time, I have found very little to change in its message. Thirty years have passed, but Montessori's advice is as relevant today as it was in 1966. New pictures have been added, but the text remains virtually the same. The children who were normalized at age six remained so as they advanced through their years with us. They exhibited great strength and power from six to twelve years of age and continued to learn for the sake of learning, displaying remarkable independence, initiative, decision-making abilities, and advanced academic skills.

Dr. Montessori's insights as to the nature and needs of the child at each stage of development were eminently sound and have now been time-tested by our school as well as many other schools across the nation and around the world. Therefore I am indeed grateful to David Kahn and the North American Montessori Teachers' Association for the opportunity to reprint the booklet. It is our hope to share with a new generation of parents Montessori's vision of education as *"an aid to life."*

Kathleen H. Futrell
April, 1998

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The most striking [response], and one that is almost like a magic wand for opening the gate to the normal expression of a child's natural gifts, is activity concentrated on some task that requires movement of the hands guided by the intellect. This gives rise to further activities more deeply rooted in the child's interior such as a "repetition of the exercise," and "free choice." These reveal the true child. We see him kindled with joy and indefatigable in his toil since his activities are like a psychic metabolism with which his life and growth are intimately connected. Choice is now his guiding principle.

—*Maria Montessori,*
The Secret of Childhood

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The essential thing is for the task to arouse such an interest that it engages the whole personality. In our schools this moment of healing is not the point of arrival . . . but it is the point of departure, after which "freedom of action" consolidates and develops the personality.

—*Maria Montessori*, The Secret of Childhood

Maria Montessori believed the purpose of education is to be an aid to life. It should go far beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge in various areas of culture.

She believed further that the children on whom this "burden of education" falls have a nature quite different from that of adults. While adults have reached the norm of the species, children are in a constant state of metamorphosis, creating for themselves the individuals they are to be. And the environment in which they evolve will shape them just as surely as their genetic inheritance.

While Sigmund Freud was doing research on the abnormalities of behavior, which have their roots in early childhood, Montessori approached the problem of the child's psyche by suggesting that the ideal environment be prepared for each developing human being, that a child's needs at every stage be studied, and that a way be provided for these needs to be met. The first groups of children whom Montessori undertook to study gave her the opportunity of observing these needs.

Montessori was ideally suited to do this observation because of her background in anthropology and her understanding of the physiology and neurology of the child. Further, she had studied the works of Drs. Seguin and Itard and had added to her research on the child's cognitive processes.

However, her early charges must have been a challenge even for Montessori. In *The Montessori Method*, she describes them as "sixty tearful, frightened children, so shy that it was

impossible to get them to speak; with bewildered eyes, as though they had never seen anything in their lives."

These sixty children were given to her along with an untrained aide because the landlord in the tenement where they lived wanted to keep them busy, more or less to keep them from defacing the walls and vandalizing his property. Since she did not have the intention of evolving a pedagogical system, she began with no fixed ideas of what to teach these children. Instead, she observed what they needed to do and learn, and she prepared materials to help with these acquisitions. She observed what obstacles they had to overcome and set about removing them.

If we consider the child's very first environment—in the womb of the mother—we realize that nature has given us a clue to an ideal environment. Here the child has warmth, nourishment, security, shelter, protection, and freedom to develop without interference in response to nature's plan.

What followed seemed incredible even to Dr. Montessori, for these deprived children blossomed under this freedom and under the possibility of doing work suited to their needs. They revealed to her not only their enormous capacity for intellectual accomplishment but a strange character of sweetness and serenity. They displayed a truly uncorrupted spirit, scorning rewards and punishments, and finding their joy in the prodigious work which engaged them. They came from these labors refreshed, as if from a creative experience, and as they worked, they grew in inner discipline and peace.

The sight of these children, who displayed the truly "normal" characteristics of childhood, was the force that motivated Montessori for the remainder of her life. This "secret of childhood" she pursued with all the vitality of the genius who has found her *raison d'être*, and, from her tireless observations and efforts, she evolved her perception of the child's personality.

As she traveled from country to country, lecturing, training teachers, helping to establish school after school, this same phenomenon was observed wherever conditions promoting its growth were perfectly realized.

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This normalized child is the image which Montessori teachers keep uppermost in their minds. This is what we are striving for, what we hope to achieve. However, this child will appear only if we conscientiously prepare ourselves and our classrooms and if we can build on the proper preparation in the child's home.

We must build on the enormous growth that has taken place in the child from conception up until the time he or she reaches the environment of the Montessori classroom. If we consider the child's very first environment—in the womb of the mother—we realize that nature has given us a clue to an ideal environment. Here the child has warmth, nourishment, security, shelter, protection, and freedom to develop without interference in response to nature's plan.

The second environment the child encounters is that of the home. How perfect that will be depends entirely on how clearly the child's needs are understood and how lovingly and unselfishly these needs are provided for. We must consider the needs of the child just as analytically as we would consider the needs of a plant we were about to grow. One could not expect a perfect plant to develop if its need for sunlight were ignored, or if the sunlight were provided and the need for water ignored, or if both of these needs were remembered but the plant were forced to grow in poor soil.

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THE NEED FOR MOVEMENT

What are the needs of children from infancy to age three? First, they have the need for movement. They need to move, explore, manipulate, and store up impressions to classify later on. A child's first room should not be so sterile, antiseptic, and stark that there is nothing in it on which the developing mind can feed. Children should not be compelled to stay in their rooms like a being sealed in a vacuum for endless hours. As soon as they are able to move about, they should be free to do so. Playpens, restraining devices, and such have their place, on occasion, for children's safety, but their use should be carefully limited to avoid a stultifying or frustrating effect. Children will not be ready for precise, graceful movement at three years of age if they have had little opportunity for movement at all from birth to three.

Certainly, a child under three should never be encouraged to watch television. This is far too passive, uncreative, and non-productive in a period of life when the child's development cries out for activity, manipulation, exploration, and storing up of sensory experiences.

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THE NEED FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Children need to hear language spoken, obviously. They need to be in the company of those whose culture they will adopt as their own. Infants will watch with great intensity the adults around them, watch their mouths as they speak, sometimes even attempt to touch their mouths. Later, they will imitate sounds, babble. And still later, all without anyone ever consciously teaching them, they will have constructed their own language, complete with nouns, verbs, a tense structure, and all the intonations and inflections they have heard. This is another reason for not shutting the infant up in the nursery for endless hours. Montessori admired the mothers around the world who carried their babies with them wherever they went: to the marketplace, visiting a friend. Everywhere, the child was able to hear and was intensely interested in the talk going on nearby.

Children need to hear not only the elementary language concerned with their needs—e.g., eating, sleeping, caring for themselves—but the precise language of every area of culture. If a child asks about a piece of music, we can answer with the exact name of the composition, even its composer. A tree that a child notices has a particular name; its leaves have a distinctive shape. A bird that attracts a child can be given its specific name and special characteristics.

Later, in the Montessori classroom, children will be offered the expanded vocabulary of many areas of culture, such as geometry, geography, and biology, but the groundwork for this can be laid at home. Children have an appetite for specific vocabulary. Long words do not frighten but fascinate them.

A great deal of time can be spent conversing with children even at this early age. And a great deal can be done in training

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them to follow specific directions such as "bring me the large book" or "please take this blue vase to the kitchen table" or "pick up your chair and carry it across the room; put it down near the window," gradually increasing the complexity of our commands.

They can be helped to listen for sounds, isolated sounds. In our culture, daily life is filled with noise—with sounds of traffic or construction, background music, voices, or television—so much that children's ability to listen is sometimes dulled. When there is never an opportunity for silence, children will miss out on the precious ability to collect their thoughts, to compose themselves. The adults at home can help also by deliberately softening their voices when they speak to a child, so that the child will later be responsive to suggestions given under the decibel level of a shout.

Children like to play the sound game, isolating sounds they hear in words. We play it at school by saying, "I spy with my little eye something in this room that begins with 'm' or 't.'" If this is done with your child at home, isolate the sound that each letter makes—not the letter name as it is heard in the alphabet. The vowel sounds we use first are the short ones.

One mother told me she and her child were glancing through a magazine. The child became very excited and pointed to some letters and said, "Look! There's *S*, and there's *F*." Certainly, stories read to children at this early age can only help to increase their appreciation of the beauty and power of language.

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THE NEED FOR INDEPENDENCE

It could be a rule of thumb never to do for children that which they have learned or are trying to learn to do for themselves. This requires great forbearance, patience, and planning on the part of parents. When children show an interest in learning to dress themselves, they should be given enough time to practice without hurrying. If we are teaching them a new skill, we should try to isolate the difficulty and teach one step at a time. If we really want children to grow into independent and resourceful adults, we should stop pouring their milk as soon as they have learned to pour it themselves and stop fastening their buttons as soon as they can fasten them without help. In the period of infancy, parents do a great deal of physical tending to children's needs, but they should be watchful for the moment to arrive when they must discontinue this physical tending. If they do not, their children may become indolent by having things done for them long after the time when they need or desire help. Or they may despair of learning to care for themselves and be started on the road to an inferiority complex.

If we really want children to grow into independent and resourceful adults, we should stop pouring their milk as soon as they have learned to pour it themselves and stop fastening their buttons as soon as they can fasten them without help.

In *The Secret of Childhood,* Montessori describes the "deviated" child who suffers from "attachment, a lack of vital energy and indolence." She diagnoses the cause: "Without realizing, an adult with his useless assistance and hypnotic influence has substituted himself for a child and impeded his psychic growth." She describes another set of characteristics, "timidity, hesitancy in making decisions, a withdrawal before difficulties or criticism, frequent tears, an appearance of despair." She attributes the cause again to an adult "constantly interrupting the child and breaking into his environment." This powerful being directs the child's life without ever consulting the child. This lack of consideration makes the child think his or her own activities are of no value.

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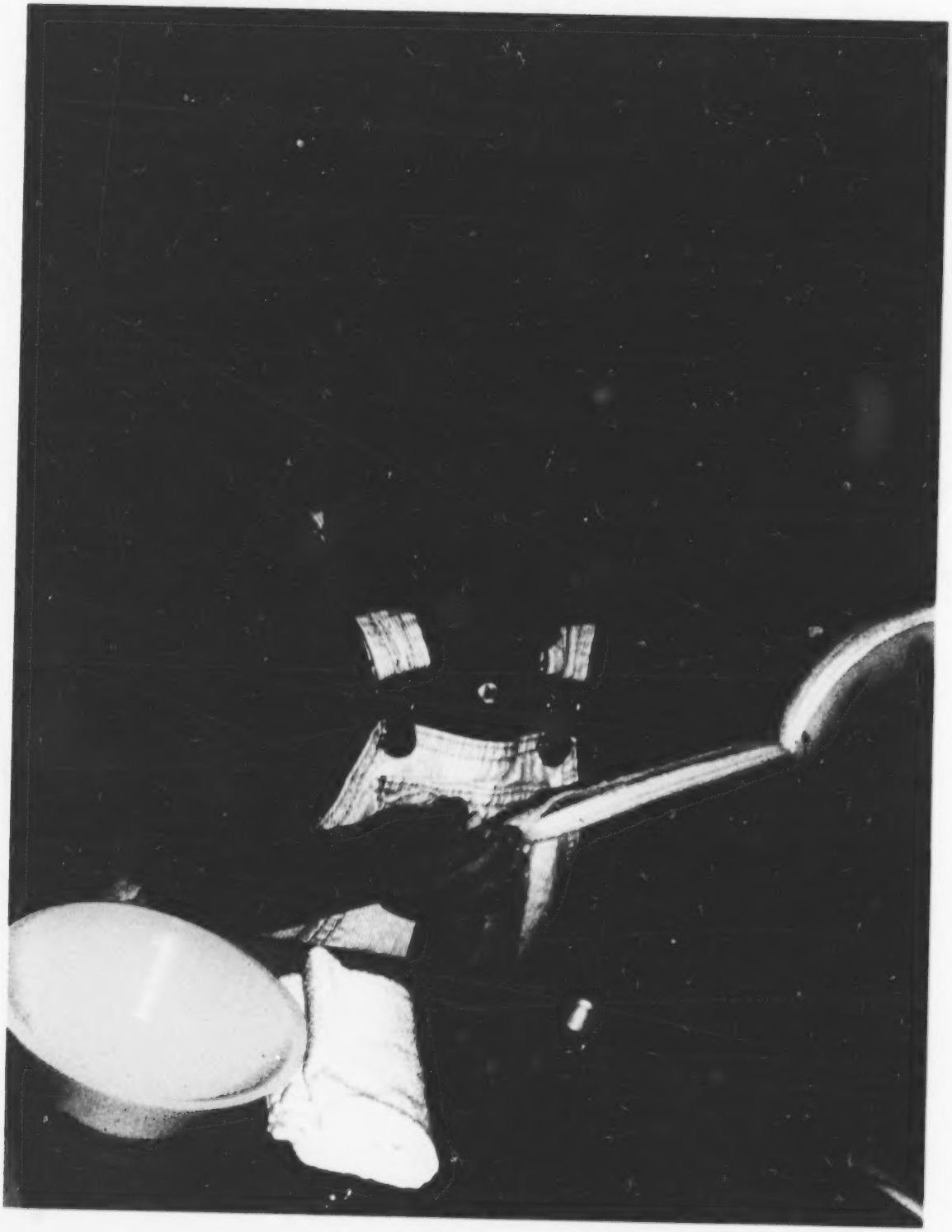

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THE NEED FOR LOVE AND SECURITY

It is hard for us to believe that our children need constantly the reassurance that we love them. Children perceive our love in the quantity and quality of time we are willing to give them. They will know for sure that we love them only if we spend time with them. They want from us not gifts, not things, but ourselves. They will just as readily perceive our preference for an all-consuming career, a golf game, a bridge game, or work which is not necessary, as a rejection of them.

One summer at school, we had a small five-year-old boy who was the envy of all the older boys because he could toss a baseball into the air and nine times out of ten hit it accurately with his bat. We learned that his father was a Boy Scout leader, accustomed to spending great amounts of time playing with his son in the company of other boys. This little boy had not only acquired this physical prowess but was characterized by a considerable amount of poise as well as the self-assurance that comes from feeling loved and secure.

THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE

Children need to be taught to respect the rights of others just as their own rights are respected. If children are treated with consideration, they will more readily adopt the attitude of extending the same courtesy to others. In *The Secret of Childhood,* Montessori wrote, "A child readily obeys an adult. But when an adult asks him to renounce

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those instincts that favor his development, he cannot obey. When an adult demands such a sacrifice to his own personal interests, ... a child's tantrums and rebellions are nothing more than the aspects of a vital conflict between his creative impulses and his love for an adult who fails to understand his needs. ... We should remember that a child loves us and wants to obey. A child loves an adult beyond everything else."

This does not mean that we must foolishly indulge every whim or allow children to be disorderly, disruptive, destructive, or inconsiderate. For the small child, there should be very few rules. But those few should be consistently observed. They can be enforced not by coaxing, haranguing, or bribing, but simply by setting certain limits and, as much as possible, consistently and firmly seeing that these limits are adhered to. We are well aware of the effort it takes to be firm and consistent. We realize you are dealing with your children not for just a few hours a day but all day and night, and, in some cases, with an infant, throughout the night. Therefore, this advice is given in all humility. To be sure, "it is more easily said than done."

THE NEED FOR ORDER

Montessori believed that a child comes to internal order through external order and that this internal order is prerequisite to intellectual expansion. When children come into the world, it must appear to them chaotic. They must learn to classify, categorize all the objects they see, learn the names and uses of these objects. We can help by making their home environment as orderly as possible, not constantly shifting things about, and by giving them an opportunity to keep their own possessions in order. There should not be so many toys that children cannot possibly arrange them or care for them. The toy box is not very helpful along this line because

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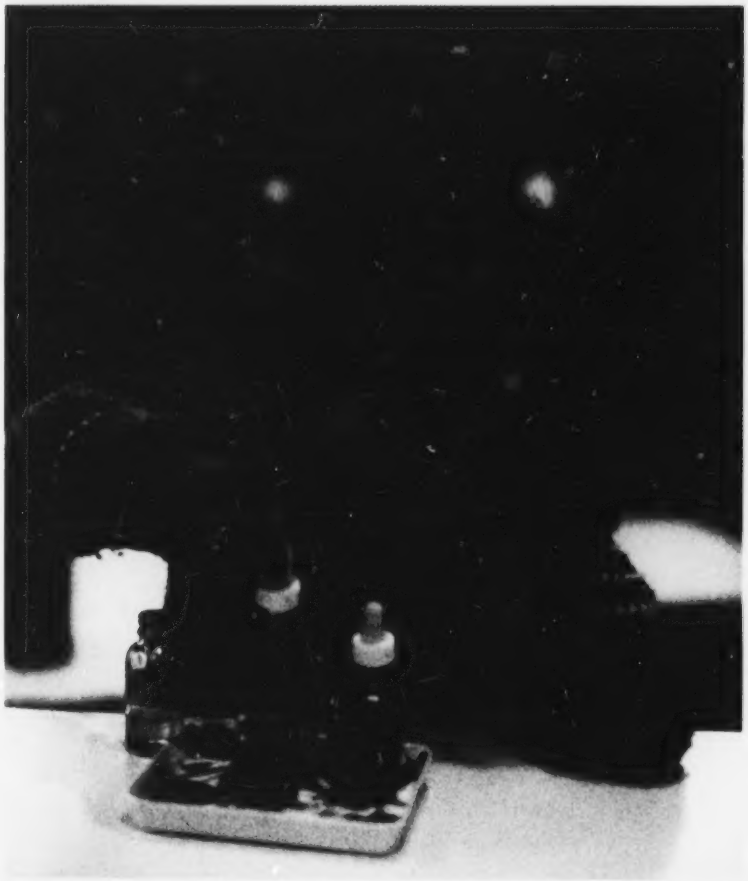
it encourages children to throw in the doll on top of the truck and the stuffed rabbit on top of both of them and the ball on top of all that, without regard for the preservation of their individual beauty and repair. Low shelves can be constructed and a place designated for each toy. Clothes rods can be set down where children can reach them to put away their clothes. A place can be set aside where they may work with crayons or paints. It should be possible for children to keep their space in order by themselves if we provide tools that fit their small hands and that they are capable of using without help.



If all these needs are met in the environment of children from birth to three—that is, movement, language, independence, love and security, discipline, and order—and they arrive in the Montessori class at the proper age, 2 to 3, they will be ready for expanded development in the prepared environment of the Montessori class. They will have here the opportunity for social development, for living in a community with older children and younger children. They will have the materials and the equipment they need to classify their impressions and the keys to learning in mathematics and language. They will have the opportunity to further their development in independence and the control of their movements. They will have the opportunity to work with materials leading to precision and concentration.

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After a period of time, with the true cooperation of school and home, with a true understanding of how to meet the child's needs, this normalized child will appear. How does Montessori describe the normalized child?

Perhaps you have one at home and didn't realize what a treasure you have! While we are examining the list of characteristics, we can also examine how the school and the home can provide for their growth.

A Love of Order

One can watch a small child in a Montessori class taking out a mat and unrolling it on the floor, ready to start to work. She observes a fleck of dust, gets the broom, and sweeps it off. Then, with increased satisfaction and enjoyment, she proceeds to lay out her material. This orderliness is jealously guarded and carefully promoted in the classroom. Montessori teachers are told, "All the apparatus must be meticulously in order, beautiful and shiny, in perfect condition. Nothing must

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be missing, so that to the child it always seems new, complete, and ready for use." To show you what lengths we go to in aiding the construction of children's minds and helping their ability to classify, a shoe polishing set might have a red ribbon, a red apron, a red applicator, a red brush, a red buffer. It will be obvious that these things belong together. The silver polishing set has a pink ribbon around the basket, a pink polishing cloth, a pink mat, a pink sponge, and so on.

When children have finished with any of these polishing exercises, they put soiled cloths in a laundry bag (another child will wash these later), discard any used cotton or paper, replace all these items with fresh clean ones, and return the basket to its place on the shelf, ready for the next child's use. This kind of order is not mere fussiness but a genuine respect for the materials with which they work and a generous consideration for the other members of their small society.

A Love of Work

Some of our children choose for themselves fantastic amounts of work. For instance, one child decided to transcribe approximately fifty printed phonogram cards into cursive writing. It took her several days. But this was work she chose herself. It was certainly far in excess of what any teacher would choose for her. One child went on with an exercise in long division for two days in succession. He divided 81 and then 80 and then 79 and then 78 and so on down to 1 with all possible divisors, using a board and beads. He was full of enthusiasm for this work right to the end. He would come into class in the morning and announce, "I'm starting on 31 today." Another child did a story on the voices of mammals, researching the text on the back of our biology cards, choosing the section pertaining to the subject that interested her, the various sounds the mammals make. She wrote

the story, made a booklet, and drew a picture on the front cover, a matter of three days' work.

When a child is working and chooses some task that holds his or her attention, we are careful not to interrupt either to correct or to praise. This might disrupt the powers of concentration which are so important for the child's development. This attitude could readily be extended at home. When a child undertakes any job, for example, to make a bed, we should never do it over again, regardless of how inadequate a job we believe the child has done. We can simply re-teach at another time what we seem to have taught improperly.

Children in a Montessori class have a possibility of working for long periods of time on one task. Their abilities are not fragmented by having 20 minutes of art, 20 minutes of spelling, and 20 minutes of mathematics. This room is dedicated to them and they are free to move about in it and to apply themselves to all kinds of formative work. Each child is free to pursue one area of learning or many in one day. When a child truly chooses a task and sees it to completion without help, he or she is well on the way to becoming a free, independent being.

LOVE OF SILENCE AND WORKING ALONE

In a Montessori class, there is far more interaction than one would see in a traditional classroom where the children are silent by decree rather than by choice. In his book *How Children Fail* (1964), John Holt asks, "Who in the classroom needs the most practice in speaking? The children. Who gets the most? The teacher."

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Here, the children are free to discuss their work with each other, to dictate movable alphabet words to each other, to work together in pairs or in small groups.

However, one child may not just join another who is working alone without first obtaining the other's permission. The right of a child to work alone is respected.

Sometimes, we play what we call "The Silence Game," in which the children try to sit perfectly still and maintain complete silence for a few minutes and listen to the sounds around them. It can be a time for introspection and peace. When the few minutes are up, frequently the children applaud—they seem to be so delighted with this period of silence they impose on themselves.

MUTUAL AID AND COOPERATION

You will notice the absence here of graded papers. There is no work strung up on the bulletin boards, pasted over with stars which praise some but automatically condemn the children who never, no matter how hard they work, see their work so rewarded. We believe competition among small children is not only bad for those children who can never succeed, or are convinced at an early age that they cannot, but bad also for those who are made to feel superior, in whom are sown the seeds of arrogance and pride. Children forced to compete are encouraged to

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work for an A, a 100, or a star, rather than for the knowledge to be acquired or the joy of learning itself. We believe in giving the children an opportunity to help each other, in fact to teach each other. We have discovered that some of the children are marvelous teachers—and why not? They are fresh from the experience of learning what they seek to teach; they may perceive all the stumbling blocks to comprehension better than an adult. They are full of enthusiasm for this task which is still appealing to them. The mixture of ages in the classroom makes it possible for an older child to help a younger one without any resentment being felt. This help benefits the older children by strengthening their qualities of leadership and competence, and it benefits the younger children by providing the help they need and allowing them to trust and respect their older friends.

As an example of the harm that can be done by competition, one year I taught sixty-three children in the fifth grade in a traditional school. In this class, there was a wide range of abilities. Yet all these children were expected to work together in lockstep, everybody on page 38 at the same time. All that year, I kept thinking of the irreparable damage done to the psyche of these children, forced to work together and compete with each other, some bored and some uncomprehending and struggling. This was the year I began to read Montessori's books and found her suggestions so eminently reasonable. When I later had the opportunity to visit the Montessori schools in Europe, I was most impressed with how tranquil and self-reliant the children were, because each child was working at his or her own level.

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PROFOUND SPONTANEOUS CONCENTRATION

It is not unusual here to see a child reading or working so intently as to be oblivious to the work being done all around.

Perhaps there is a little child scrubbing a neighboring table vigorously. And on a mat nearby there may be three children working with the mathematics material known as the bank game. This requires much counting aloud and exchanging of units for tens, tens for hundreds, and so on. This kind of concentration is not possible at first; the children new to the classroom seem to be characterized by instability of attention. This profound concentration is the result of a long inner growth. It can be developed by the exercises of Practical Life, which help to focus the child's attention on real things and provide an opportunity for a lengthened cycle of work.

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OBEDIENCE

In *The Absorbent Mind,* Montessori speaks of three levels of obedience: On the first level, "before the child is three he cannot obey unless the order he receives corresponds with one of his vital urges." The second level is reached when "his powers are ... consolidated and can be directed not only by his own will, but also by the will of another." On the third level, "he obeys with astonishing readiness, and seems anxious to do so." That one can take directions is a sudden discovery that brings with it a new kind of enthusiasm. A normalized child should have reached the third level of obedience, the level of eager, joyful responsiveness to the will of the adult in authority.

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INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE

We make every attempt to guard this independence and initiative by not interfering with children when they have chosen work, unless they are obviously misusing it or disturbing someone else.

It frequently astonishes us here at school that when asked to choose several activities or exercises, a child will make a list for himself of precisely what he needs to do. In fact, a teacher may realize with a shock that the child has chosen for himself more wisely than the teacher would have chosen for him. And on his own initiative he will set for himself tasks far in excess of any the teacher might propose. We make every attempt to guard this independence and initiative by not interfering with children when they have chosen work, unless they are obviously misusing it or disturbing someone else. The equipment itself fosters this independence by having within it a control of error, which frees children from the needless help of the adult. After work has been introduced, children may work with it on their own. They are thereby working for their own formation, their own progress, not hanging on the approval of those around them or working to be a "teacher pleaser." This independence and initiative can be encouraged at home by allowing children time to complete work they have chosen or been asked to do.

These tasks will not only foster independence but add to the child's security by yielding the feeling of being a functioning, worthwhile member of the family. No matter how young, a child can contribute something to the care of his or her home by watering the plants, setting the table, or dusting the furniture.

We can even help children become more independent by giving some thought to the kind of clothing they wear, choosing suits, dresses, coats, boots, and hats they will find easy to manage for themselves.

SPONTANEOUS SELF-DISCIPLINE

The discipline which reveals itself in a Montessori class comes more from within than from without. Moreover, it does not come into existence in a day, or a week, or even a month. It is, in Montessori's words, "the end of a long process of maturation" (*The Absorbent Mind*). This inner discipline indeed will not reveal itself at all if there is a complete dichotomy between the home and school environments. If the home environment is overly indulgent and permissive, or if it is stultifying and rigid, it will not be possible in the short period of time children are at school to change their outlook. However, if the true purpose of a Montessori education is understood—if at home and at school children receive similar direction—this discipline will arrive. In *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori describes the atmosphere in a class of self-disciplined children in this way: "The period in which discipline becomes established [is one] of active peace, of obedience and love, when work is perfected and multiplied, just as when the flowers in spring get their colors and prepare a distant harvest of sweet and nourishing fruit."

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ATTACHMENT TO REALITY

It might be well to clarify here the position of Montessori with regard to stories of fantasy. Montessori believed that children need to sort their impressions, to learn what is true and what is not true. What she decried was the tendency of adults to add to children's confusion by presenting stories of fable or fantasy before they can readily distinguish the truth from fiction. It is not necessary to entertain children by telling them wild tales. If you say to a small child, "If you turn this knob just so, and pull—like this—the door will open," the child will find that just as exciting and far more helpful than if you say, "If you open this door you will see a tiger on the other side."

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Montessori did not say that there is never a place for imaginative tales but that they should not be introduced until children are able to judge for themselves, "This is a myth. It is great fun but it is not true." There is more than enough time for the beautiful fairy stories and fables which form our literary heritage when children are 5 to 6+, and perhaps able to read them independently.

I think I can say without equivocation that television, with its distortions, its violence, its vulgarities, its invitation to passivity, can be one of the worst possible influences on the lives of children. It would be worthwhile to explore together also how much time each child spends a week watching TV and measure it against time spent developing physical skills or in active creative experiences. The ill effects of too much television watching have been well documented by many studies.

SUBLIMATION OF THE POSSESSIVE INSTINCT

Montessori believed that envy and competition are signs of a restricted mental development, of a limited outlook. Here in the Montessori environment, children own only what they know. They share the use of everything, and if something is in use that they would like to work with, they learn to wait until it is free. There are no individual pencils, seats, books, or equipment. They are all common property, to be understood, enjoyed, and replaced ready for the next child's use. Again, to quote Montessori: "If a child finds no stimuli for the activities which would contribute to his development, he is attracted simply to 'things' and desires to possess them. ... A man's attachment to many things and his reluctance to give them up, even if they are of no use to him, is a deadly poison that can upset his basic equilibrium" (*The Secret of Childhood*).

What can be done at home to sublimate this possessive instinct? This will require enough self-control on the part of mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather to limit the number of possessions a child has. This means not buying a child a two-wheeled bike which she will not be ready to ride for another year, or not allowing her to receive five dolls for Christmas from well-meaning relatives. Our society will fight against your good resolutions. Even the supermarkets are so constructed that they foster greed in children. Right near the cash register are placed the final lures, candies and trinkets which children have time to beg for while the grocery bill is being tallied. The TV commercials, especially before the holidays, are particularly insidious, as they encourage children to tell their parents they want specific toys. If we allow ourselves to be overly indulgent and we build up this possessive instinct in children, we need not wonder if we see them playing together and observe that they cannot share nor take turns.

JOY

To the normalized child, learning is a happy experience. If one is able to harness a child's innate delight in discovery, to make use of a child's self-motivation, there is no reason why this enthusiasm for school should fade.

I know of one family whose members were all standing breathless beside their radio one snowy morning. There were two older children who were listening for the words, "All Fairfax County high schools closed because of snow"; the mother, who is also a teacher, was listening for an announcement of a D.C. school closing; a younger child who attended elementary school waited to hear her school's name mentioned; and finally, there was a Montessori child watching all this interest and excitement. As each of the announcements came—"Closed because of snow"—there was much clapping and celebrating. The small child was completely bewildered and, perhaps, scandalized. He said to them, "But don't you like to go to school?"

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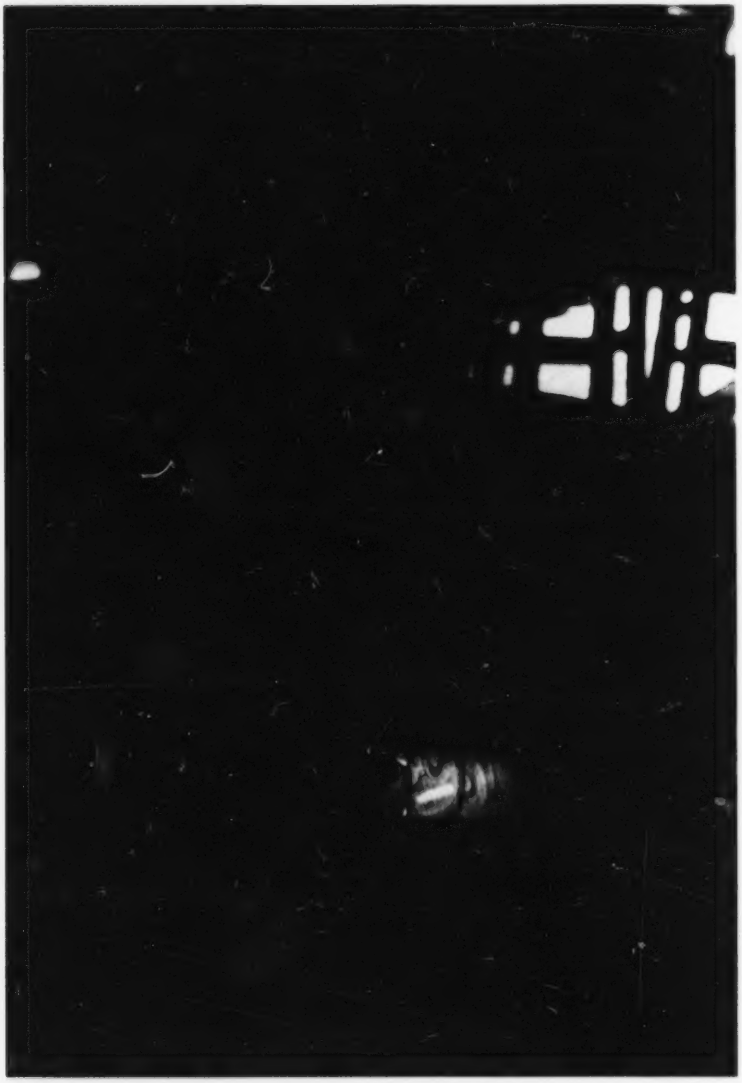
One summer we had children up to twelve years old here at our summer program. We introduced the older children to the Montessori equipment and allowed them to use it during the period right after lunch. The children who were learning multiplication tables were shown the Montessori multiplication board. We let them use the geography maps, the biology, history, and language material. Their comments were, "You mean to say you let little kids use this stuff?" or "I've eaten my lunch. Can't I go in and work now?" Their joy in work was revived for the time.



However, if children are kept year after year in lockstep learning, where they have no hand in initiating their activities, where they are, as Montessori describes it, like butterflies pinned to their desks, their enthusiasm for learning will diminish or disappear completely.

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THE NORMALIZED CHILD

To recapitulate, normalized children have a love of order, a love of work, and profound spontaneous concentration; they are attached to reality, they have a love of silence and working alone, they have sublimated the possessive instinct, they are cheerfully obedient, and they possess independence and initiative. They are cooperative and mutually helpful. They possess self-discipline and joy.

Montessori said in her last published work, *The Formation of Man:* "It is possible to conceive a universal movement for human reconstruction which follows a single path. Its sole aim is to help man preserve his balance, his psychic health, and build up a secure orientation in the present conditions of the outer world. In the light of this, education should be a social and human endeavor of interest to all. It must be based on psychology in order to safeguard the individuality of the child. It needs a syllabus which can give an understanding of the conditions of man in modern society, with a cosmic vision of history and the evolution of human life."

After a period of time, with the true cooperation of school and home, with a true understanding of how to meet the child's needs, this normalized child will appear.

We ask you, the parents who are joined with us in this work on behalf of the child, to consider the insights of Montessori: not only her discoveries of the child's cognitive processes but her formula for the ideal environment in which a child can grow.

Our efforts here will be fruitless unless you, whose impact on the child is greatest, truly understand and approve of our purposes.

Perhaps by working together we can make these normalized children our contribution to society—our society whose search for peace and a cure for its ills must turn eventually to the individual's evolution, each person's orientation to life.

AFTERWORD

One of the advantages of being a longtime Montessori practitioner is the opportunity to see or hear from former students who are now adults. They come back to the school for a visit; they write and send pictures of their wedding or their first baby. (They assure us that this child will surely attend a Montessori school.) They send their business cards in case we are in need of their services! They are uniformly confident and positive about their chosen careers and their prospects for the future.

These former students had the opportunity for normalization in their early years. They were spared the deviations that would lead to character flaws or neuroses. It is indeed gratifying to know that they are now leading productive, fulfilling lives.

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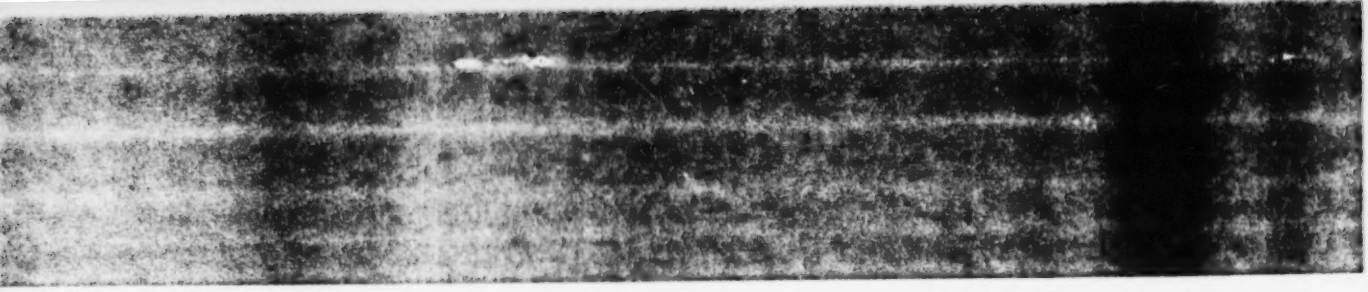

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